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OPERATION CHROMITE: OPERATIONAL ART IN A LIMITED WAR

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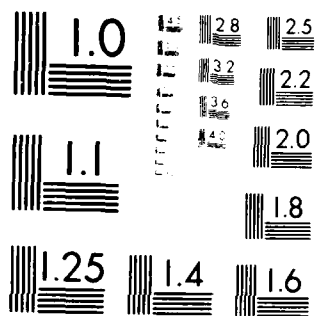
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Operation CHROMITE: Operational Art
in a Limited War

by

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Infantry

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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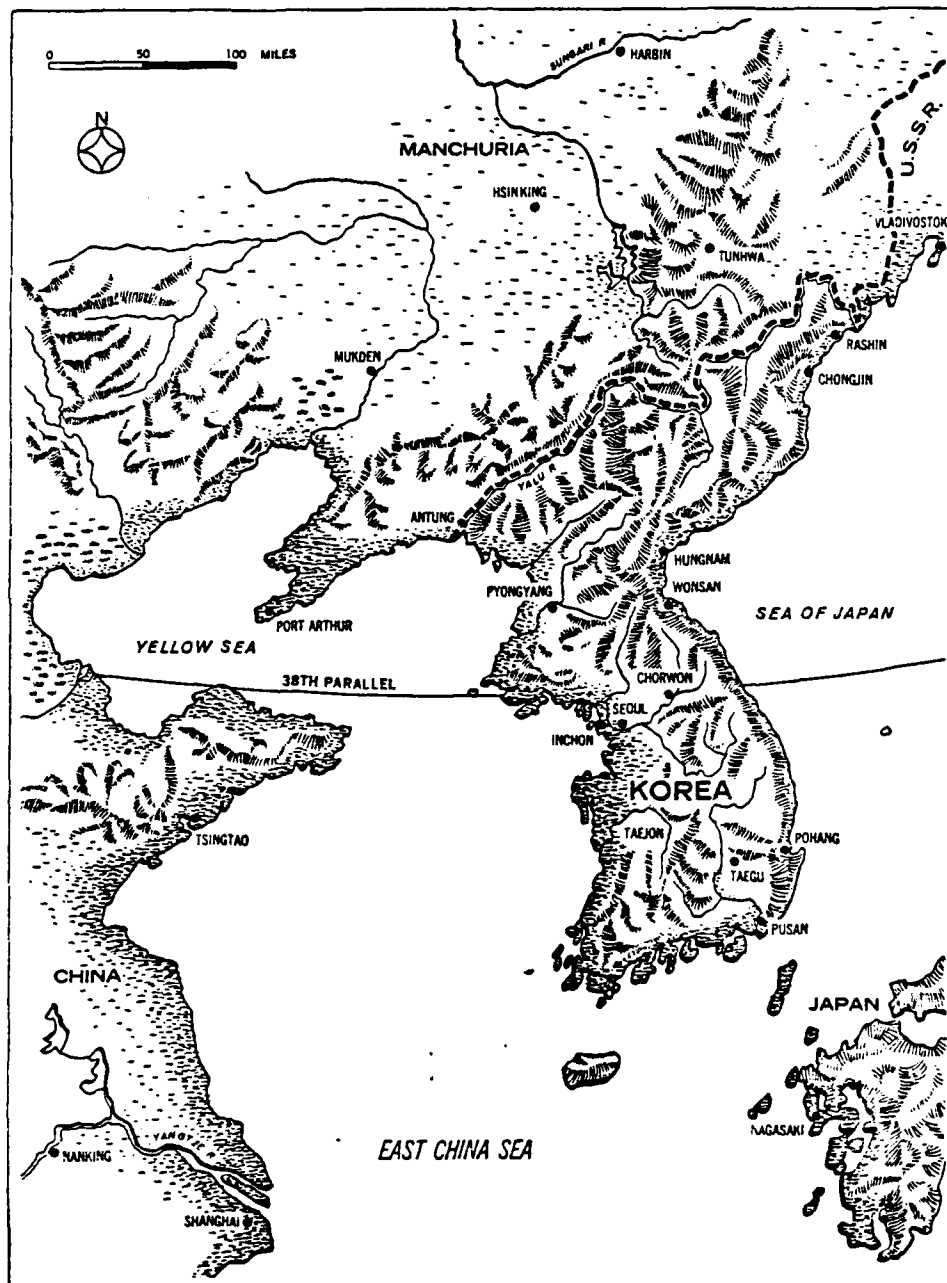
ABSTRACT

OPERATION CHROMITE: OPERATIONAL ART IN A LIMITED WAR by
Major David H. Mamaux, USA, 25 pages.

This monograph analyzes MacArthur's brilliant landing at Inchon, Korea, on 15 September 1950, in the light of lessons which can be gleaned for students of the operational level of war.

CHROMITE had several unique aspects: it was executed against the advice of numerous amphibious warfare experts; it was the first major operation the U.S. undertook in the Nuclear Age; it was conducted with scarce resources in a secondary theater of war; and perhaps most important, CHROMITE was the first major operation conducted under the eyes of the (then) newly-created Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Emphasis is placed on the genius of MacArthur, the operational concepts he employed in formulating his plan, and his role as advocate for his plan against the opposition of the JCS.



Map of Korea

The war was not going well for the United Nations Command forces attacking out of the Pusan Perimeter on 19 September 1950. Even with total air superiority and a secure, functioning line of communications to Japan, General Walton Walker, commander of the U.S. Eighth Army, was stymied. His 156,000 American, Korean, and British soldiers were not having much success in breaking the ring established by 70,000 soldiers of the North Korean People's Army (NKPA). The South Korean units were in particularly bad shape; they were lightly-equipped constabulary forces and had been reeling under fierce attacks since the war began on 25 June. But neither had their more heavily-armed American comrades-in-arms been advancing rapidly since the breakout effort began on the 16th, and on the 19th, "General MacArthur entertained serious doubts about the Eighth Army's ability to break out of the Pusan Perimeter."¹ By the end of the 19th, however, it was apparent that the enemy had begun to withdraw voluntarily from his entrenched positions around Pusan, and by 23 September the ring had completely evaporated. "The Eighth Army and the ROK Army stood on the eve of pursuit and exploitation, a long-awaited revenge for the bitter weeks of defeat and death."² What had caused this startling turnabout?

The landing at Inchon by the United States Marine Corps' First Division and the United States Army's 7th Division, under the command of X Corps, was the catalyst which propelled the UN forces to victory in September 1950.

It was the genius of General Douglas MacArthur which conceived one of the greatest operations in recorded military history, a deep amphibious turning movement linked with an offensive from Pusan. This landing, known by the code name CHROMITE, was followed by the liberation of Seoul, the breakout of Eighth Army, the destruction of the NKPA, the restoration of the 38th Parallel, and the re-establishment of the Republic of Korea. All of these events occurred in the first limited war of the recently-born Nuclear Age, and under the supervision of the (then) newly-created Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In light of this, the Inchon-Seoul campaign is an excellent campaign to examine as an example of operational art in limited wars.

Operation CHROMITE has some other features which attract the student of operational art and military history. The distances involved are slight, the longest distance being the 180 air miles from the Pusan Perimeter to Inchon. Time was also compressed: from the landing at Inchon to the ejection of all organized NKPA forces from South Korea, only two weeks elapsed. The relatively small number of forces engaged in the operational area of CHROMITE, as well as in the theater, makes comprehension easier. It is especially helpful that a direct cause -and-effect relationship can be seen between CHROMITE and its aftermath, and that the written record of the U.S. participants is extensive. And yet, it seems there is tantalizingly little : a landing from

the sea, a breakout from Pusan, hammer against anvil, and the enemy is defeated in two weeks. Is that all there was to CHROMITE and the rest of MacArthur's campaign? Could it really have been so simple? "Everything in war is very simple," said Clausewitz, "but the simplest thing is difficult."³

MacArthur's last war was only four days old, and he was ten days away from being named commander-in-chief of the United Nations Command, when he flew to Korea to make a personal assessment of the situation. He rode twenty miles in a jeep from the airfield at Suwon to a point on the south bank of the Han River from where he could see Seoul, which was already occupied. In his memoirs, MacArthur described the view of the refugees fleeing the active battlefield, and then he wrote:

I watched for an hour the pitiful evidence of the disaster I had inherited. In that brief interval on the blood-soaked hill, I formulated my plans. They were desperate plans indeed, but I could see no other way except to accept a defeat.... The scene along the Han was enough to convince me that the defensive potential of South Korea had already been exhausted.I would rely upon strategic maneuver to overcome the great odds against me. It⁴ would be desperate, but it was my only chance.

MacArthur continued his ruminations, turning over in his mind the possible actions he could take, the risk he

could withstand, the units he could improvise, so as to buy time and set the scene for his next move. He asked himself:

Could I, if all this were accomplished and the enemy's tenuous supply lines extended to dangerous limits, cut these lines, then envelop and destroy his main forces with only a handful of troops available? I would be outnumbered almost three to one. But in these reflections the genesis of the Inchon operation began to take shape--the counter-stroke that could wrest victory from defeat.⁵

In these few paragraphs from MacArthur, his coup d'oeil and operational reasoning are evident. Clausewitz defined coup d'oeil as "the quick recognition of a truth that the mind would ordinarily miss or would perceive only after long study and reflection."⁶ General MacArthur rapidly saw that the ROK Army was no longer a factor, and that he would get only limited U.S. forces. He had to use what he would get in a manner which would avoid slugging it out with the well-armed North Koreans, but he still had to defeat the mass of the NKPA in order to recover South Korea. The best way (i.e., the quickest and cheapest way) to destroy the NKPA was to cut the "enemy's tenuous supply lines" which, given the terrain of Korea, had to run through Seoul to the south. The best means of reaching around the NKPA would be by sea, and since Inchon was the potential beachhead closest to Seoul, the amphibious landing would have to be at Inchon. Although MacArthur wrote in very simple, non-theoretical terms, it is easy to see here his mastery of three concepts of operational art: the center of gravity

(the NKPA), the decisive point (the enemy's line of communications running through Seoul), and the indirect approach (the target was not enemy strength but enemy vulnerability where the enemy would have to turn and attack.) He did not orient on the port of Inchon as being vital in and of itself, save when it became part of his LOC. MacArthur oriented on the enemy army, and Inchon was a point of entry which would enable him to grab the enemy's jugular at Seoul, and then destroy the enemy army when, without supplies, it tried to avoid the X Corps anvil and the Eighth Army hammer.

Reconstructing what may have been the instinctive, subconscious thought process of the general also shows that he possessed another of the attributes Clausewitz said was necessary for a great commander: the grasp of "the relationship between warfare and terrain."⁷ He must have, as MacArthur had of Korea, "an overall knowledge of the configuration of a province, of an entire country. His mind must hold a vivid picture of the road-network, the river-lines and the mountain ranges, without ever losing a sense of his immediate surroundings."⁸ This attribute helped him form the Inchon plan, and would help him defend the plan in Tokyo when other locations were suggested for the proposed landing. Having devised the operational concept he knew would defeat his enemy, MacArthur flew back to Japan to let his staff struggle with the details.

General MacArthur gave his concept for Inchon to his chief of staff about 2 July, and had his first Far East Command headquarters discussion on it 4 July. This tentative plan had the code name BLUEHEARTS and was scheduled for execution on 22 July, but it was called off 10 July due to a shortage of assault troops and the continuing drive of the NKPA to the south. Looking at the dates of the plan's formulation and its expected execution, coupled with the scarcity of troops and amphibious shipping, one cannot accuse MacArthur of letting grass grow under his feet. While his Far East Command's Joint Strategic Plans and Operations Group (JSPOG) grappled with planning, MacArthur sought to get the resources he needed from the United States. On 7 July, before BLUEHEARTS' demise, he sent a message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff which explained his need for more than five extra U.S. divisions for Korea. For the first time, he informed the JCS that he intended to do something besides reinforce the UN positions in Korea: his ultimate purpose, he wrote, was "fully to exploit our air and sea control and, by amphibious maneuver, strike behind his mass of ground forces."⁹

MacArthur was certain that he had the solution to winning the war in a short, sharp manner. He did not underrate the NKPA; indeed, his 7 July message to the JCS had evaluated his enemy as "an aggressive and well trained professional army operating under excellent top level guidance and demonstrated superior command of strategic and

tactical principles."¹⁰ Even with this formidable opponent and his own shortages, his certainty remained. The U.S. Army's official history of this part of the Korean War explains this certitude succinctly:

It was natural and predictable that General MacArthur should think in terms of an amphibious landing in the rear of the enemy to win the Korean War. His campaigns in the Southwest Pacific in World War II--after Bataan--all began as amphibious operations. From Australia to Luzon his forces often advanced around enemy-held islands, one after another. Control of the seas gives mobility to military power. Mobility and war of maneuver have always brought the greatest prizes and the quickest decisions to their practitioners. A water-borne sweep around the enemy's flank and an attack in his rear against lines of supply and communications appealed to MacArthur's sense of grand tactics. He never wavered from this concept, although repeatedly the fortunes of war compelled him to postpone its execution.¹¹

MacArthur's certainty was not shared by the JCS. He professed himself to be "amazed when this message of desperate need for the necessary strength to implement a Washington decision [i.e., to expel the NKPA from South Korea] was disapproved by Washington itself."¹² JCS had rejected the appeal because of a scarcity of resources (shipping and divisions), but more importantly, because the JCS, the President, and the State Department were more concerned about possible Russian moves in Europe, the theater which had first priority in 1950. MacArthur sent another request for reinforcements to the JCS, and received the same negative answer. MacArthur persevered. He lobbied the inbound commander of the Fleet Marine Force Pacific, LTG Lemuel Shepherd, Jr., on 10 July, and convinced him to use

his own authority to order the 1st Marine Division to be ready for combat by 1 September, the "where" of the combat to be announced later. (Later, he would lobby Averell Harriman, who would visit him as President Truman's special representative on 6 August, for more forces for his theater and for a greater appreciation of the value of the Far East.)

There was another factor which may have been operating at this time, an undercurrent in the world of the "Tank" which involved the value and practicability of amphibious operations themselves. The Marines were fervent believers in their raison d'etre, and the Navy could be expected to concur with the Marines in the abstract. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs was of a completely different mind. General Omar Bradley had participated in OVERLORD and was well aware of the many amphibious operations conducted successfully, albeit occasionally at great cost, in the Pacific, but he had also watched as another great amphibious turning movement had been bungled at Anzio. Moreover, Bradley had gone on the public record as saying that the changing conditions of warfare had raised great doubt as to the continuing validity of sea-to-shore envelopment. In 1949 he had stated to a Senate committee: "I am wondering whether we shall ever have another large-scale amphibious operation. Frankly, the atomic bomb, properly delivered, almost precludes such a possibility."¹³ There is no public record of valid JCS fears that the Soviets had contemplated

use of an atomic bomb in Korea, and Bradley was obviously a few years premature in ruling out amphibious operations, but he was the JCS Chairman and exerted great influence on both banks of the Potomac, whereas MacArthur had to rely on his messages to exert his influence over the vast distance from Tokyo to Washington.

MacArthur was given a direct personal glimpse into the collective mind of the Joint Chiefs in Tokyo on 13 July, when he was visited by Army General "Lightning Joe" Collins and Air Force General Hoyt Vandenberg, the chiefs of their respective services. They were accompanied by Admiral Radford, CINCPAC, who was the CNO's representative. Collins was not sold on the concept of landing from the sea behind the NKPA, and he explained to MacArthur that the JCS were not going to shift the flow of reinforcements from Europe to Korea. According to several accounts, Collins told MacArthur, "General, you are going to have to win the war out here with the troops available to you in Japan and Korea," and MacArthur...smiled, shook his head, and said, "Joe, you are going to have to change your mind."¹⁴ Before the visit was over, Collins had changed his mind, and both he and Radford agreed that the 1st Marine Division and its supporting aviation should be sent to the Far East. On 15 July, MacArthur again asked JCS for the Marine division, and on 25 July he received a positive response. In the tortuous struggle between the strategic allocators of resources and the operational commander with a vision only of his own

theater, MacArthur was slowly extracting what he needed, but the climax of the disagreement with the JCS, in which honest men could honestly differ, was yet to come.

Throughout this period and later, the JSPOG had refined its planning for the great turning movement. Sometime between 7 and 20 July, MacArthur became convinced that the best option was the Inchon landing, although he had told Collins that he was considering other locations as well. The JSPOG plan circulated at Far East Command on 23 July called for an amphibious operation in mid-September at one of three locations: Inchon, Kunsan, or Chumunjin-up. The landing would be accompanied by a simultaneous offensive by Eighth Army. In his memoirs, MacArthur recounted how he had analyzed the importance of the LOC through Seoul to the enemy; how he had secured his base of operations in Japan by trusting the Japanese and adding 100,00 men to the Japanese defense force, and how he was

now finally ready for the last great stroke to bring my plan into fruition. My Han River dream as a possibility had begun to assume the certainties of reality--a turning movement deep into the flank and rear of the enemy that would sever his supply lines and encircle all his forces south of Seoul. I had made similar decisions in past campaigns, but none more fraught with danger, none that promised to be more vitally conclusive if successful. The target I selected was Inchon, 20 miles west of Seoul and the second largest port in South Korea. The target date, because of the great tides at Inchon, had to be in the middle of September. This meant that the staging for the landing at Inchon would have to be accomplished more rapidly than that of any other large amphibious operation in modern warfare.¹⁵

Supremely confident that his vision was correct, that his staff had planned thoroughly and correctly, and that his troops could accomplish the mission if he had enough of the right kind, MacArthur sent another cable to the JCS on the same day, 23 July, that CHROMITE was circulated within his headquarters. In it he stated:

Operation planned mid-September is amphibious landing of a two division corps in rear of enemy lines for purpose of enveloping and destroying enemy forces in conjunction with an attack from south by Eighth Army. I am firmly convinced that early and strong effort behind his front will sever his main lines of communication and enable us to deliver a decisive and crushing blow. The alternative is a frontal attack which can only₁₆ result in a protracted and expensive campaign.

There was one other component of Plan 100-B which MacArthur oversaw while simultaneously imploring the Joint Chiefs for more combat power: the breakout by Eighth Army. In order to gain the maximum psychological benefit of the landing in the NKPA's rear, MacArthur had also to present the enemy commander and his troops with a dilemma to their front. Eighth Army had to hold its position so tightly that the enemy would become psychologically as well as physically stuck fast to his Pusan objective. The enemy would understandably be uneasy when the landing in the rear occurred, and his dilemma would be compounded when the enemy to the NKPA's front, instead of remaining beleaguered, somehow found the strength of arms and will to launch a counter-offensive. With the tables turned front and rear,

MacArthur knew, the enemy would be psychologically unhinged, and after the disruption would come the destruction.

In order to reassure himself that Pusan would be held and that Eighth Army could become the hammer for the Inchon anvil, MacArthur flew to confer with General Walker on 27 July. To his chagrin, he learned that Walker had planned a series of meticulously detailed retrograde operations to the south. Although he could offer Walker little in the way of reinforcements, and would later take units from the Pusan Perimeter to land at Inchon, MacArthur directed Walker to scrap the planned retrograde movements; they did not conform to Plan 100-B. Walker went his commander one better: he counterattacked and had regained fifteen miles by 11 August. This fulfilled MacArthur's plan: not only was the NKPA firmly stuck to Pusan, and with tunnel vision looking only at Pusan, but more combat at the extreme end of the supply line meant that the NKPA's dependence on the LOC was increased. When CHROMITE succeeded, the success would be bigger , and would come more quickly.

Having satisfied himself that the Pusan part of the plan was going well, and that all his other problems were manageable at his end, MacArthur issued Plan 100-B as Operation Plan 100-B on 12 August, and specifically designated the Inchon-Seoul area as the target of the invasion force. As August wore on, the JCS became uncomfortable about MacArthur's proposed landing. It had not escaped their notice that the 23 July cable had not

included the definite location for the operation. Having examined the three locations mentioned in the 13 July meeting with Collins, the JCS had taken the misgivings of the Pentagon's experts on amphibious landings to heart: they were not pleased by the possibility that Inchon could be the site. In mid-August, MacArthur received a message from the JCS that the Army and Navy Chiefs would be in Tokyo on 23 August for a discussion of CHROMITE. MacArthur's own words set the stage for the meeting: "It was evident immediately upon their arrival that the actual purpose of their trip was not so much to discuss as to dissuade."¹⁷

To be fair to the JCS, they were not the only serving officers who had serious misgivings about the selection of Inchon. Some of these other officers were on MacArthur's staff and had participated in planning and executing numerous similar operations in the Pacific, as Marines or sailors. They were not "nervous Nellies" and were loyal to their commander, but their considered professional opinions had led them to gulp hard when they read Plan 100-B. Rear Admiral James H. Doyle, who was chosen to lead the landing, knew that Inchon had no proper beaches, only city streets and some seawalls. The currents of the narrow approach channels were treacherous, and the waters might be mined. The abnormal tides were a nightmare to even a peacetime navigator in daylight. Add to this the possibility of enemy resistance at night and it is easy to understand the comment of Doyle's gunnery officer: "We drew up a list of every

natural and geographic handicap--and Inchon had 'em all."¹⁸ Doyle's communications officer was equally pessimistic and blunt: "Make up a list of amphibious 'don'ts' and you have an exact description of the Inchon operation."¹⁹ In a last-minute attempt to get MacArthur to change his plan and his schedule, Admiral Doyle had teamed with the commander of the 1st Marine Division, Major General O.P. Smith. "... both men concluded that, because of nightmarish logistical problems and the many difficulties associated with the Inchon site, the target date for the landing should be postponed at least a week and the landing should be made at Posung-myon, about twenty miles south of Inchon."²⁰ On 22 August Smith had an audience with MacArthur, in which Smith's arguments were brushed aside and Smith was assured that "the war would be over in one month after the assault."²¹ Smith would later comment on this meeting: "It was more than confidence which upheld him; it was supreme and almost mystical faith that he could not fail."²²

Although MacArthur respected the opinions of his experts, and had given them a fair hearing, he had in the end overruled them. They were, after all, his subordinates, and he, too, had no small experience in amphibious warfare. It would be another thing to deal with the powerful flag-rank officers who would meet him in the Dai Ichi Building, MacArthur's headquarters, on 23 August. These men would have to be convinced, because they could not be overruled. They were the representatives of the military council which

could bestow or withhold the precious divisions and shipping MacArthur needed. He had his vision for Inchon, and they had their fears about Inchon's waters. He had his eyes fixed on America's only shooting war, and they had their eyes on Europe, as did the President. He was MacArthur, but they had earned the right to sit in the "Tank". The climax of the conflict between the operational commander and his military superiors had arrived. Unlike the JCS who could approve, deny, or delay, MacArthur had to win the showdown in Tokyo to meet his 15 September deadline with the tides in Inchon harbor. "Thus, at a little after five thirty p.m. on August 23, in the Dai Ichi Building, there occurred one of the most important strategy debates in American military history. It was also the most important strategy debate in the Korean war."²³

The full-dress briefing on Plan 100-B was conducted by nine naval officers for eighty minutes. After eighty minutes of details which emphasized that the proposed landing violated the Navy-Marine doctrine on amphibious warfare, Admiral Doyle rose and said: "... the best I can say is that Inchon is not impossible."²⁴ General Collins followed with the suggestion that the landing should assault the beach at Kunsan, one hundred miles to the south, where the beaches were real and Walker was closer. He also suggested Posun-Myong. General Shepherd of the Fleet Marine Force Pacific agreed with the Kunsan alternative. Collins also expressed doubt that the Inchon force, even if it

captured Seoul, could link up with Walker. He also stated the possibility that the NKPA might be present in the Seoul area in great strength and would defeat the two divisions landed at Inchon. When the last of the critics had spoken, MacArthur stood to speak. There is no verbatim transcript of the proceedings that day, and eyewitnesses disagree both on his exact words and on how long he spoke, but all agreed that it was a rare performance. Doyle's quote is perhaps the best: "If MacArthur had gone on the stage, you never would have heard of John Barrymore."²⁵

MacArthur now assumed a role not often associated with operational art: that of advocate. Like a lawyer before a jury, like a salesman with a customer, he had to make his case on his own. His speech combined his operational principles, their particular application to Inchon, historical references which buttressed his position, disparagement of the contending cases for Kunsan or anywhere but Inchon, an understanding of the psychology of the North Koreans, a call to glory, rhetorical flourishes, and a vision of the victory that Inchon alone could produce. In his own words, as he recalled them years later:

The bulk of the Reds...are committed around Walker's defense perimeter. The enemy, I am convinced, has failed to prepare Inchon properly for defense. The very arguments you have made as to the impracticabilities involved will tend to insure for me the element of surprise. For the enemy commander will reason that no one would be so brash as to make such an attempt. Surprise is the most vital element for

success in war. [Here MacArthur cited the defeat of Montcalm by Wolfe near Quebec in 1759.] Like Montcalm, the North Koreans would regard an Inchon landing as impossible. Like Wolfe, I could take them by surprise.

The Navy's objections as to tides, hydrography, terrain, and physical handicaps are indeed substantial and pertinent. But they are not insuperable. My confidence in the Navy is complete, and in fact I seem to have more confidence in the Navy than the Navy has in itself.

As to the proposal for a landing at Kunsan, it would indeed eliminate many of the hazards of Inchon, but it would be largely ineffective and indecisive. It would be an attempted envelopement which would not envelop. It would not sever or destroy the enemy's supply lines or distribution center, and therefore serve little purpose. It would be a "short envelopement," and nothing in war is more futile. Better no flank movement than one such as this. The only result would be a hookup with Walker's troops on his left. It would be better to send the troops directly to Walker than by such an indirect and costly process. In other words, this would simply be sending more troops to help Walker "hang on," and hanging on [is] not good enough. No decision can be reached by defensive action in Walker's perimeter. To fight frontally in a breakthrough from Pusan will be bloody and indecisive. The enemy will merely roll back on his lines of supply....

But seizure of Inchon and Seoul will cut the enemy's supply line and seal off the entire southern peninsula. The vulnerability of the enemy is his supply position. Every step southward extends his transport lines and renders them more frail and subject to dislocation. The several major lines of enemy supply from the north converge on Seoul, and from Seoul they radiate to ...the front. By seizing Seoul I would completely paralyze the enemy's supply system.... This will paralyze the...troops that now face Walker. Without munitions and food they will soon be helpless and disorganized, and can easily be overpowered by our smaller but well-supplied forces.[Inchon] is our anvil, and Johnnie Walker can smash against it from the south. The only alternative to a stroke such as I propose will be the continuation of the savage sacrifice we are making at Pusan, with no hope of relief in sight. Are you content to let our troops stay

in that bloody perimeter like beef cattle in the slaughterhouse? Who will take the responsibility for such tragedy? Certainly, I will not. [MacArthur then conjures up a vision of a victory in Korea, precipitated by the Inchon landing, and how it would save Europe.] I can almost hear the ticking of the second hand of destiny. We must act now or we will die. ...Inchon will not fail. Inchon will succeed. And it will save 100,000 lives.²⁶

Is there any doubt that MacArthur carried the day? Could the Navy have admitted that it could not brave the hazards of Flying Fish Channel? Could Collins, perhaps remembering the difficulty of breaking out of Normandy in 1944, have argued further for a "futile" envelopment at Kunsan? MacArthur had met the critics head on and had taken them to the mountaintop, or to speak more correctly, he had taken them to Inchon.

Amazingly enough, the converts began the very next day to backslide on their new faith. The admirals and the Marine generals carped that the Army planners weren't weighting the significant naval factors properly. The Army Chief of Staff cornered MacArthur's G-3 to make sure that an alternate plan, for Kunsan, would be ready if needed. In a visit with MacArthur before departing for Hawaii, Shepherd tried one more time to derail the Inchon plan. Patiently, he was given another 30-minute treatment of the MacArthur oratory. In his conclusion, MacArthur declared, "For a five dollar ante, I have an opportunity to win \$50,000, and I have decided that is what I'm going to do."²⁷

Generals Bradley and Vandenberg were so eager to learn what had transpired in Tokyo that they met Collins and Sherman upon their arrival at Washington's National Airport. On 28 August the Joint Chiefs cabled their lukewarm approval of CHROMITE to Tokyo. The text showed that Collins was still struggling hard, and that the Joint Chiefs were preparing their defenses for the history books:

We concur in making preparations for executing a turning movement by amphibious forces on the west coast of Korea, either at Inchon in the event the enemy defenses in the vicinity of Inchon prove ineffective, or at a favorable beach south of Inchon if one can be located. We further concur in preparations, if desired by you, for an envelopment by amphibious forces in vicinity of Kunsan. We understand that alternative plans are being prepared in order to best exploit the situation as it develops.²⁸ [In the future, you will provide us] with timely information as to your intentions and plans for offensive operations.²⁹

This message was received only seventeen days before the Marines were to land. MacArthur issued the CHROMITE operations order on 30 August. To deceive the NKPA as to the real landing site, he ordered the Seventh Fleet to fake a landing at Kunsan and conduct bombardments at likely landing places on the east coast of Korea. While juggling Marine and Army regiments to get the right force to Inchon and still hold Pusan, and rounding up from the Japanese enough LST crews, MacArthur "neglected" to keep the JCS informed per their 28 August cable. Accordingly, he received a JCS message on 5 September requesting an update on CHROMITE. MacArthur replied that a courier would deliver a copy of the complete operations order by 11 September, but

"the general outline of the plan remains as described to you."³⁰ The JCS sent another message on 7 September: "It was at this eleventh hour that I received a message from the Joint Chiefs of Staff which chilled me to the marrow of my bones."³¹ The key part of the cable read as follows:

We have noted with considerable concern the recent trend of events in Korea [the NKPA was attacking Walker heavily]. In light of the commitment of all of the reserves available to the Eighth Army, we desire your estimate as to the feasibility and chance of success of projected³² operation if initiated on the planned schedule.

This message makes crystal-clear the fact that the JCS did not understand the character of their subordinate. Did they seriously hope that MacArthur was going to let them off the hook just as he was so close to executing CHROMITE? He had cajoled and convinced for months to get the forces he needed to win a great victory, and now the JCS, whom he had so patiently lectured on the art of war, were showing themselves to be bad students and timid to boot. The return message was direct and forceful, and included another mini-lecture on the virtues of executing the landing at Inchon and on schedule. His opening was in the same vein as the speech in the Dai Ichi Building:

I regard the chance of success of the operation as excellent. I go further in belief that it represents the only hope of wresting the initiative from the enemy and thereby presenting the opportunity for a decisive blow. To do otherwise is to commit us to a war of indefinite

duration, of gradual attrition and of doubtful result....There is not the slightest possibility, however, of our forces being ejected from the Pusan beachhead. The envelopment from the north will instantly relieve the pressure upon the south perimeter and, indeed, is the only way that this can be accomplished. The success of the enveloping movement from the north does not depend upon the rapid juncture of the X Corps with the Eighth Army. The prompt juncture of our two ~~forces~~³³...is not a vital part of the operation.

One day later, after Bradley visited the President in Blair House, the JCS sent the following to MacArthur: "We approve your plan and President has been so informed."³⁴

On 12 September MacArthur boarded the command ship U.S.S. Mount McKinley and sailed for Inchon. On 13 September, MacArthur's courier arrived in Washington with the CHROMITE operations order for the JCS. He had been cautioned by his commander not to arrive there "too soon,"³⁵ and he had complied. He made his presentation to the JCS on 14 September, but given the time difference between Washington and the Mount McKinley, the Joint Chiefs probably could not have halted the assault had they seen the need to do so. General Douglas MacArthur was on the verge of fulfilling the orders given to him almost three months before, and he would beat his own prophecy of victory within one month after the landing by two weeks.

There are several interesting issues for the student of operational art, but it is not always easy to determine if MacArthur thought in the terms in use today. In asking if he discerned North Korea's center of gravity, one is framing

the question in terms that MacArthur himself did not use. However, it is clear from several of the quotations above that he saw the North Korean center of gravity as the thirteen divisions of the NKPA attacking the Pusan Perimeter. He also knew that it would be unnecessarily bloody and slow to reinforce Walker and try to push out from Pusan as had been the penchant of U.S. generals in the European Theater of Operations in World War II. He chose to attack the center of gravity indirectly, by destroying the enemy's supplies and interdicting on the ground his lines of communication. The decisive point he selected for his indirect approach was Seoul, which was the main supply depot for the NKPA, and the hub of its LOCs. To get to Seoul and its airfield, Kimpo, MacArthur wanted to travel the shortest distance possible, and the answer to his beach location problem was Inchon. Analyzed in this fashion, the choice of Inchon was startlingly obvious, if one has faith in the Navy. MacArthur placed great store in three other operational tenets: surprise, initiative, and [amphibious] turning movements. The amphibious capability of the Navy-Marine team gave him flexibility as well, but primarily it gave him the advantage of striking where and when he chose, to the enemy's consternation.

Although MacArthur fought strongly for his choice of Inchon, it should not be construed that he had oriented on the port as his objective. He knew that ownership of Inchon alone gave him nothing. The port was his entry into the

unprotected rear base area of the NKPA eighteen miles away, and the enemy LOCs and the psychological stability of the enemy army were the real operational prizes.

Was the destruction of the NKPA a decisive or climactic battle in the Napoleonic/Clausewitzian sense? If one stipulates that there were in fact two "Korean Wars," and that their dividing point was the entry of Chinese "volunteers" to rescue the Kim Il Sung government, one can argue that the battle which destroyed the NKPA was decisive or climactic. A battle of this nature involves the engagement of the main forces of the antagonists and the destruction of one side, and is directly and immediately linked to the political submission of the losing side. The Inchon-Seoul campaign led to the moral and physical destruction of the NKPA in two weeks, one of the greatest military reversals in history. The North Korean government had to abandon its goal of reuniting the south with the north by force because it had no army left. The 38th Parallel and the government of South Korea were restored, and this result did not change even after the entry of the Chinese. The United Nations Command won the "First Korean War", and this victory was made possible by the decisive/climactic battle which removed the NKPA from the field.

If one examines the logistic considerations which affected the planning for Operation NEPTUNE (the amphibious component of OVERLORD), a sharp contrast with CHROMITE is

discernible: Friendly logistics played a key role in NEPTUNE but not in CHROMITE. The Allies made important tactical decisions based on their own projected logistic requirements in Normandy, such as the proximity of the beaches to deep water ports and the expected pace of the supply build-up in the beachhead area. There is no evidence that logistical factors determined the concept of operations for CHROMITE. MacArthur picked Inchon for its proximity to the enemy's logistic base and LOC's, and was undeterred by the logistic difficulties the USMC and Army amphibious planners had to surmount in order to make the concept workable.

Was the decision to land at Inchon an example of boldness by the operational-level commander, or was it so dependent for its success on luck and the complete absence of friction as to be reckless and foolhardy, worthy of condemnation even though it succeeded? The reader can of course draw his own conclusion, and should not be mesmerized by the persona of MacArthur, his reputation, or the success of CHROMITE in doing so. On balance, however, the verdict seems to favor boldness. A great military mind had mulled over the situation on 29 June 1950, had gotten inside the mind of the enemy, had weighed the risks at Inchon against its opinion of the Navy's capabilities, had added in the factor of surprise, and had concluded that in this case, the motto "Who dares, wins" was correct. The line between boldness and recklessness was especially fine in this case,

but MacArthur did not feel that he had transgressed into recklessness. To him, it was the only possible decision.

Inchon was the first major campaign conducted under the scrutiny of the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The public documents and private memoirs of the major protagonists amply show the involvement of this military committee in the resourcing and approval of CHROMITE. To MacArthur, the Joint Chiefs were the people with his resources but with none of his vision or his responsibility to win the war in Korea and hold Japan. To the Joint Chiefs, especially to Bradley and Collins, MacArthur was a living legend, a walking national monument to military genius, who had been Army Chief of Staff before they were colonels. Given MacArthur's record of success with amphibious turning movements in the Pacific, they must have been reluctant to even question MacArthur, and felt compelled to do so only because Inchon was so manifestly a horrible place to land. It is interesting to speculate on the JCS reaction if a lesser figure, for example, Walker, had proposed Plan 100-B. It is likely that Inchon would not be a battle streamer on the flag of the 1st Marine Division.

This last discussion of MacArthur the historical figure leads naturally to the question: Was he Clausewitz's "genius" in the art of war? Clausewitz listed several traits which, "taken together, constitute the essence of military genius."³⁶ They are: courage (physical and moral); an intellect that "even in the darkest hour,

retains some glimmerings of the inner light which leads to truth";³⁷ determination; presence of mind; and strength of character. After applying these standards outlined in Chapter Three, Book One of On War to MacArthur, it is without hesitation that many assign the label of "genius" to him. But Clausewitz has a last test:

...history and posterity reserve the name of 'genius' for those who have excelled in the highest positions--as commanders-in-chief--since here the demands for intellectual and moral powers are vastly greater. To bring a war, or one of its campaigns, to a successful close requires a thorough grasp of national policy. On that level strategy and policy coalesce: the commander-in-chief is simultaneously a statesman.³⁸

In conceiving and carrying through the Inchon-Seoul campaign, MacArthur met the increased demands on his intellectual and moral powers, especially the latter. He withstood the tremendous pressure exerted by amphibious warfare experts and his superiors to ensure that CHROMITE was executed where and when he wanted. While recognizing that operational genius is seldom encountered and is not reliably predictive of success in war, and that a commander who, while not a genius, has mastered sound doctrine can also be supremely successful, MacArthur's brilliant use of his special talents at Inchon cannot be played down. He brought the ensuing campaign and the "First Korean War" to a successful conclusion for his side, and in so doing, passed Clausewitz's, and history's, last test of genius.

ENDNOTES

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3. Carl von Clausewitz, On War (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), p.119.
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5. Ibid., pp.333-334.
6. Clausewitz, op.cit., p.102.
7. Ibid., p.109.
8. Ibid., p.110.
9. MacArthur, op.cit., p.337.
10. Ibid.
11. Appleman, op.cit., p.488.
12. MacArthur, op.cit., p.337.
13. William Manchester, American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur 1880-1964 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), p.573.
14. Ibid., p.573.
15. MacArthur, op.cit., p.347.
16. Ibid., p.346.
17. MacArthur, op.cit., p.347.

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19. Ibid.
20. D. Clayton James, The Years of MacArthur: Volume III
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21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
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24. Colonel Robert Debs Heinl, Jr., USMC, Victory at
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25. Manchester, op.cit., p.575.
26. MacArthur, op.cit., pp.349-350.
27. Heinl, op.cit., p.43.
28. Ibid., p.44.
29. James, op.cit., p.471.
30. Ibid., pp.472-473.
31. MacArthur, op.cit., p.351.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p.352.
34. Appleman, op.cit., p.495.
35. James, op.cit., p.474.
36. von Clausewitz, op.cit., p.100.
37. Ibid., p.102.
38. Ibid. p.111.

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